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REVIEWS AND CRITICISMS

PROBLEMS OF SUBNORMALITY. By *J. E. Wallace Wallin*, with an introduction by *John W. Withers, Ph.D.* New York, World Book Co., 1917. Pp. xxxii+485.

Because this work of Dr. Wallin is the first attempt to set before the psychological profession comprehensively the many problems confronting the clinical worker, a somewhat lengthy review of "Problems of Subnormality" would appear to be justified. In the preface the author states the four fundamental questions which deserve scientific treatment, viz., the perfecting of differential diagnosis which is in part considered in Chapter I and more completely in Chapter II, under the heading, "Who Is Feeble-minded?"; the problem of differential educational treatment in Chapter III; the matter of after-care and control in Chapters IV, V and VI; and preventive measures in Chapter VII. The material contributed by the author himself is drawn from his own extensive personal experience in the psychological clinics of the University of Pittsburgh and the St. Louis school system.

Throughout this work, the author maintains a rigorously scientific attitude toward the material of his text, though he is sometimes constrained to admit that much discussion possibly was centered about an inconsequential matter (p. 299). If the tendency to scrutinize material painstakingly does sometimes delay the development of the author's thesis, its justification is seen throughout the work, for many of the tacitly accepted standards of retardation indicative of feeble-mindedness are seriously called into question. So, likewise, are data on heredity such as are frequently submitted in so-called scientific surveys.

The appearance of this work will arouse the curiosity of workers in the various fields in which the problem of feeble-mindedness is a present and imperative one. The psychological profession, the profession of law and law-making including criminology; the medical profession, the teaching, and the social sciences will turn to the experience of a co-worker to find support and further direction. The reviewer will accordingly regard this work from the attitude of workers in these various fields.

I. Obviously the primary concern of the psychologist is the art of differential diagnosis. The experience of every clinical worker confirms the author's observation (p. 106) "even the trained and experienced psychologist is frequently baffled by the difficulties of mental diagnosis and completely balked by the present limitations of the science." The cautious clinical worker experiences a distinct disappointment when he reads in another place (p. 107) "Such a specialist (a properly trained examining psychologist) will be able to come to a positive decision from one examination on from 75% to 90% of the cases." The clinical worker then surveys the diagnoses of his masters in this field and finds such classification as "diagnosis deferred;

provisional diagnosis; dull from physical causes; subnormal mentality; retarded through neglect; retarded, borderland; backward, psychotic; constitutional inferior, undetermined," etc. All these together constitute from 25% to 64% of the cases examined according to the authorities consulted. (Author's table, p. 182.) Are such diagnoses to be regarded as positive decisions? The author must recognize the tentative nature of such diagnoses undoubtedly when he states (p. 78) "Moreover, many who were not retarded two years were undoubtedly feeble-minded," and again (p. 79), "Since we have attempted to be cautious in our diagnosis, it is probable that some who were diagnosed as borderline or reserved, and possibly a few diagnosed as backward, will eventually prove to be feeble-minded." Much that appears in the volume touching the matter of diagnosis is of little value to the clinical worker. It is a condemnation of the methods employed by Binet testers (author's term) who will be little perturbed by the author's remarks. Cautious workers have for a considerable period been conservative in establishing an upper limen of feeble-mindedness and in interpreting retardation. Entirely too much space in Chapter II is given to reproducing reports on mental surveys, etc., which have reached almost every clinical workers' hands, and forthwith the waste-basket. It is regrettable that many of them are taken seriously enough to be allotted space in a volume. The profession awaits a report from workers with Dr. Wallins' wide experience on such cases as he and other workers recognize "will eventually prove to be feeble-minded." Herein the volume contributes nothing. If experienced institutional workers can help us in this situation, let us encourage them to report their observations.

In view of diagnoses submitted by the author on his cases and such limitations as he recognizes respecting diagnosis, the reviewer does not feel convinced that we are ready to set aside the observation of Binet and Simon, (p. 107) "that all decisions' with respect to admissions to special schools, 'are to be recognized as provisional; the children are to be admitted to the class for defectives on trial, to be kept under observation.'" Experience in an institution convinces the reviewer that all commitments, especially in view of such limitations as the author himself points out, should be provisional, depending on re-examination at prescribed intervals.

The author's attitude respecting the functions of psychological tests and psychologists is probably due to a weakness in clinical psychological methods which justifies the statement of Yerkes: "Possibly it would be wise wholly to ignore the Binet method, on the assumption that nothing satisfactory exists." This is essentially the attitude of others, namely, Binet, Simon, Witmer, Fernald, Mitchell, Langmead, Huey, Healy, Yerks, Bridges, and Hardwich, and which is possibly best expressed in "A Point Scale," etc., thus, "the verdict often depends on the judgment of the examiner almost as completely as when no 'scale' is used." It is doubtful if any other science claiming scientific exactness in method would tolerate long so wholly unscientific a method. Let us be frank in this particular. The author states (p. 100) "Feeble-mindedness is a mental defect which can be determined only

by psychological criteria," but when pressed we find that these psychological criteria have only subjective reality. As an example of the application of a method so dependent on subjective factors, cases such as the following diagnosed by a very competent examiner may be cited: "Mary ———, age 13½ years. Mental age 10 1/5 years. The reactions of this individual indicate retardation through neglect of physical handicaps. ——— Examiner." Just what reactions indicate the condition diagnosed we are not told. Can progress in diagnoses be made when the training of the recruits in the profession is under such experts? Psychologists must free themselves of the delusion that their own personal expertness justifies their lack of a truly scientific method.

That the psychology of feeble-mindedness yet remains unwritten is apparent from the following observations of the author (p. 215), "Personally I have been quite dubious of the propriety of attempting to draw an inflexible line at any fixed age, because a degree of mental enfeeblement which might be regarded as feeble-mindedness in one person might possibly, with equal propriety, be regarded only as backwardness or borderlinity in another person. Thus we might be justified, for all practical purposes, in regarding an adult epileptic with an eleven-year mentality as feeble-minded, while we would not be justified in so regarding an eleven-year deficient of the simple type. Moreover, a mental status which we could regard as feeble-mindedness in one environment might only justify a diagnosis of backwardness in another environment." If being justified for all practical purposes determines whether society shall take action or not, one can agree with the author. But in view of the dispute between psychologists as to whether feeble-mindedness is a quantitative or qualitative difference in intelligence, or both, it is difficult to justify the author's contention scientifically.

Psychologists will be interested also in the author's discussion of the Intelligence Quotient. (Chapter II.) The author apparently follows his own bias in his computations of the quotient, employing 16 as a divisor as suggested by Terman in the cases of the poorly schooled subjects (pp. 223-227) and the actual age as divisor in the students group (pp. 228-230).

II. The legal profession will find throughout the volume much exhortation to caution in accepting the findings of surveys on the statewide distribution of feeble-mindedness; and reports on the prevalence of feeble-mindedness among offenders. Suggestions regarding forms of commitment, retention, and care of various *atypical* groups, such as the feeble-minded, epileptic, crippled, blind, including prevention, deaf, speech defective, unstable and psychopathic children, and suggestions on control and elimination of defective children through sterilization touch the legal profession. The above outlined material is contained in Chapter VI. The author presents it as suggestive material, recognizing the present legal limitations.

Of more concern, perhaps, to the legal profession is the author's attitude toward responsibility in criminal action. This matter is discussed with an illustrative case (p. 232 f.), wherein the author asks the

question: "What greater justification would there be for freeing eleven-year criminals from responsibility for their criminal acts than for freeing eleven-year successful farmers, laborers, and merchants from responsibility for their acts, whether legal or illegal?" This question together with his recommendation as to delinquent defectives (p. 399) to the effect that, "no disposition of a questionable juvenile court case (or an adult court case, either) should be made until the facts are known with respect to the individual's mental capacity and responsibility" as well as the appellation "irresponsible" applied to epileptics (p. 405), give evidence of the failure of the author to comprehend the true nature of criminal responsibility. It will be a disappointment to the earnest workers for reform of criminal law and procedure to learn of a psychologist still talking of *responsible and irresponsible persons*.

III. The medical profession will be interested doubtless in the contentions of the author respecting the rôle of the psychologist and physician in the diagnosis and treatment of mental deficiency, subnormality, backwardness, epilepsy, etc. The author questions the advisability of having the school physician make the initial selection for the special classes. He maintains that the demand for specialization makes it impossible for one person to equip himself equally well in both fields (p. 108).

IV. The educator, especially the administrator, will find in Chapter III a critique of the present organization of work for mentally and pedagogically retarded children. Little is contributed on the methods of differential educational treatment. It is organization that receives attention. The financial management of special classes would undoubtedly be a matter of vital concern to school administrators, but this matter receives no attention. Apparently the only constructive suggestion in this chapter not already much discussed by school men is the suggestion (p. 285) of *after-care* or *after-guidance* in special class cases—a function at present performed in some cities by mental hygiene societies.

V. Various phases of this work bear very intimately on social endeavor, particularly the author's suggestions regarding commitment of the feeble-minded, the epileptic, reporting the blind, deaf, crippled, speech cases, and the unstable and psychopathic, and also the suggestion regarding eugenic measures. Many of these suggestions are intended for the meeting of local needs (Missouri), and are modified by local limitations. However, much of the material has more universal application which will give directing counsel to committees on child and civic welfare.

The work is dedicated to Professor George Trumbull Ladd in commemoration of his seventy-fifth anniversary. An ample bibliography and efficient index close the volume. The volume bespeaks the ardent devotion of the author to his profession and his laborious efforts to give intelligent direction in a young but promising field of scientific endeavor.

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